DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 806 RC 022 605

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TITLE	Emerging Latino Communities: A New Challenge for the Rural South.
INSTITUTION	Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS.
SPONS AGENCY	Economic Research Service (USDA), Washington, DC.; Farm Foundation, Chicago, IL.
PUB DATE	2000-08-00
NOTE	10p.; Also sponsored by the TVA Rural Studies Program at the University of Kentucky, and 29 Southern land grant institutions.
AVAILABLE FROM	Full text at Web site: http://ext.msstate.edu/srdc/publications/millenium.htm.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
JOURNAL CIT	Rural South: Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st Century; n12 Aug 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingualism; *Educational Needs; Employment Patterns; *Hispanic Americans; *Limited English Speaking; Migration Patterns; *Population Growth; *Rural Areas; Rural Development; Social Services
IDENTIFIERS	*Latinos; *United States (Southeast)

ABSTRACT

During the last decade, there has been an internal migration of Latinos to the Southeast. Attracted by the rural South's healthy economy, the Hispanic population in the South is projected to double by 2025. Most in-migrants are seeking permanent rather than seasonal employment. With an increased Hispanic population comes increased purchasing power. On the downside, higher concentrations of Latinos also impose immediate needs for education to meet additional or special needs of the new population; for bilingual media and religious services; and for bilingual service providers in health care, social services, and law enforcement. Many factors in successful development are related to social capital. Latinos must acquire additional social and human capital to fully contribute to the economic prosperity of the rural South. This will require that meaningful interaction takes place between Latino and non-Latino residents in host communities. How the South decides to funnel its resources to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary for full participation of Latinos will determine how successful it will be at remaining in the economic forefront. (Contains 20 references and data tables on Hispanic population growth and school enrollment in 13 southern states.) (TD)

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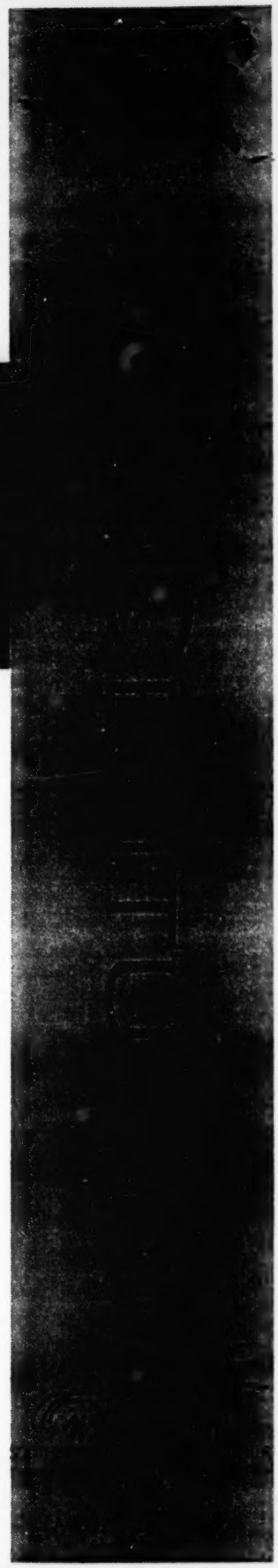

Emerging Latino communities: A new challenge for the rural South

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Introduction

It is a well-documented fact that Latinos [a] are one of the fastest growing cultural groups in the United States. A sizable and influential segment of the United States, Latinos will increase to 96.5 million (1 in 4) of the total United States population by 2050 [18]. This massive demographic shift will not only transform the country's ethnic composition but also challenge our accepted notions of national identity, language, culture, and official history [7].

Who are these Latinos? Technically, Latinos represent people from various racial backgrounds that trace their ancestry to Spain or Latin America. While Hispanics share a cultural heritage from a Spanish-speaking country, differences in nationality, politics, religion, level of education, skills, and language use exist among the Hispanic subgroups such as Mexican American, Mexican, Salvadorian, Nicaraguan, Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican. These intraethnic group differences are further exacerbated by their respective group experiences in the United States and make the collapse of the different groups into one Hispanic community for policy development purposes unacceptable. Still, the monolithic *Hispanic* identity marker continues to plague Hispanics and most, if not all, of the differences remain invisible or irrelevant to non-Latinos. Even where the North America Latino community has had a historical presence, people are at a loss to properly differentiate between a Mexican American, Mexican, Salvadorian, Nicaraguan, Cuban, Dominican, or others. Moreover, within the ethnocultural community, differences exist in self-identification preferences [2]. And though it is misleading to speak of Latinos without acknowledging the great diversity behind the label, one commonality persists—most U.S. Hispanics share the experience of living as minorities and experiencing the associate disadvantages inherent in the minority status.

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No. 12, August 2000

> "An ever-increasing number of Latinos are moving out of historic Hispanic communities in California, Texas, and Illinois and relocating in the deep South [c]."

Whether pulled by the region's labor needs or driven by their dreams for a better life, an ever-increasing number of Latinos are moving out of historic Hispanic communities in California, Texas, and Illinois and relocating in the deep South [c]. Increasingly, Latinos are drawn to Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and states where the booming economy provides ample work opportunities [3, 9, 13, 14, 17]. Demographers have long been forecasting the increased numbers and diversity of Hispanics. However, the most challenging demographic shift may be neither the increase in population size nor the increased national diversity of Latinos, but the shift in their migration and settlement patterns. For these demographic changes can disrupt established social patterns, add tension to social relations, and change the demographic, economic, and political character of our longstanding communities and places of worship, work, play, and education.

This policy brief examines the expanding Latino community in the Southern states with an emphasis on the challenges these demographic changes bring to the newly impacted regions, especially the need for and delivery of services for a growing Latino community.

Shifts in Settlement Patterns

The growing population numbers tell only the most recent chapter in the "Browning of America" saga [2]. Historically, Latinos in the South are a linguistic minority whose roots predate the founding of the country [d]. Nevertheless, before the 1980's the major settlement areas for Latinos were Texas, California, and New York. The first significant shift in permanent Latino settlement patterns came in the 1980's with the Latino movement from Texas to the Midwest [2, 15]. In the 1990's, migration and settlement shifted away from the traditional pattern to the Southeast. Though not as well documented, this movement extends from Texas and Florida to the Southeast with continued momentum. From 1990 to 1998, the Hispanic population in Georgia, North Carolina, and Arkansas more than doubled [16]. Some communities went from virtually no Hispanics to over 40 percent Hispanic [13, 14].

School enrollment figures (see Table 1) provide greater detail on the emergence of the Latino community. The number of Latino children in school indicates not only the age structure of inmigrants, but also reflects

Table 1. **Hispanics in Public Elementary and Secondary Education by State**

State	Percent of Total Enrollment			
	1987-1988	*1990-1991*	*1996-1997*	*1997-1998*
Alabama	0.1	0.7	0.7	0.8
Arkansas	0.4	1.0	1.8	2.2
Florida	9.5	13.6	15.9	16.4
Georgia	0.6	1.5	2.6	2.9
Kentucky	0.1	0.6	0.5	0.5
Louisiana	0.8	2.1	1.2	1.2
Mississippi	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.4
North Carolina	0.4	1.1	2.3	2.7
Oklahoma	1.6	4.0	4.3	4.5
South Carolina	0.2	0.9	0.8	1.0
Tennessee	0.2	0.8	0.9	1.1
Texas	32.5	32.8	37.4	37.9
Virginia	1.0	2.7	3.3	3.6

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family migration and settlement. The longitudinal Hispanic enrollment data in Table 1 indicates a steady increase of Hispanic children in most states. The steady increase between 1988 and 1998 in Hispanic student enrollment in each of the Southern states is an important indicator of community building and population permanency.

First Challenge

The first challenge for the South is to acknowledge that Latinos are here to stay and that the Latino *problem* is no longer a borderlands problem. In the past, Latino concentration in the Southwest insulated the rest of the South from the dilemma of dealing with this bicultural and linguistically different population. However, the restructuring and expansion of industries has fostered rural industrialization and produced a strong economy in the rural Southeast. Economic opportunities, coupled with strong employer recruitment, have encouraged the internal migration and immigration of Latinos to the region. For many communities, this latinization of the South represents the first significant influx of an immigrant culture in more than a hundred years. For example, South Carolina, which had not seen a major influx of foreigners since the last slave ship unloaded at Sullivans Island, is experiencing a Latino population growth six times the rate of the overall population [3].

The Issues

- Latinos are one of the fasting growing cultural groups in the United States.
- There is a shift in Latino migration and settlement patterns.
- The rural South's healthy economy will continue to attract Latinos looking for economic opportunity and a chance at the American dream.

The Trends

- Economic opportunities coupled with strong employer recruitment have encouraged the internal migration and immigration of Latinos to the Southern region.
- By 2025, the projected numeric changes will at least double the Hispanic population in the South.
- While some Hispanics still participate in season employment, most in-migrants seek permanent rather than seasonal employment.

Implications

- With an increased Hispanic population, comes increased purchasing power. On the downside, higher concentrations of Latinos also impose immediate net costs for local services, i.e., education to meet an additional or special needs of the new population, bilingual media and religious services, and bilingual service providers in health care, social services, and law enforcement.
- Rural communities in the South will find it necessary to provide meaningful interaction between Latinos and non-Latino residents in state and local policy decisions.
- How the South decides to funnel its resources to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure the successful and full participation of Latinos will determine how successful it will be at remaining in the economic forefront.

Because the trend is so recent or the numbers so small, data on the shift in settlement patterns is tentative [e] until Census 2000 data become available. Table 2 provides the 1995 Hispanic population by state as well as Hispanic population projections for each of the Southern states. These population projections strongly suggest that the "winds of change" [2] are now visiting the South and Southeast region of the United States. By 2025, the projected numeric changes will at least double the Hispanic population in the targeted states. Nationally, Texas and Florida will rank second and third in numerical change in Latino population for this time period. Given previous regional histories, growth in the Latino population for most of these states (except Texas and Florida) can be inferred to be due to net internal migration. For Texas and Florida, sources of projected growth include both natural and migration factors.

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Table 2. Hispanics in the South by State

	Population [a]				30 Year Hispanic Population Growth (1995-2025)				
	1995		2025						
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Numerical Change	U.S. Rank by Numerical Change	Percent Change	U.S. Rank by Percent Change	Percent of Voters 2000
Alabama	32	0.7	63	1.5	32	41	99.8	45	0.7
Arkansas	27	1.1	67	2.2	39	39	138.8	21	1.2
Florida	1955	13.8	4944	23.9	3000	3	152.9	16	15.0
Georgia	150	2.1	346	3.5	195	19	131.0	27	2.2
Kentucky	27	0.7	55	1.3	29	42	106.0	40	0.8
Louisiana	105	2.4	227	4.4	122	26	116.7	34	2.7
Mississippi	19	0.7	39	1.3	20	46	101.0	44	0.8
North Carolina	100	1.4	210	2.2	110	30	110.3	36	1.4
Oklahoma	104	3.2	245	6.1	141	23	134.1	24	3.1
South Carolina	36	1.0	81	1.8	46	36	122.9	32	1.0
Tennessee	45	0.9	104	1.5	57	34	125.1	31	0.9
Texas	5173	27.6	10230	37.6	5100	2	97.7	46	26.0
Virginia	209	3.2	538	6.4	329	14	157.9	13	3.5

[a] Population numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.

If one relies on the group's proportional representation across individual state populations for assessing population needs and population impact, the data for most states is not alarming, but it can be misleading. Table 2 data indicate that the Latino population will constitute an overall relatively low proportion of the population in most of the Southern states for the next 25 years. Only Texas, with approximately 38 percent Hispanic population, and Florida, with almost 24 percent, will have significant proportions of Hispanic residents.

What the data in Table 2 fail to convey is that Latinos in the South and Southeast, like other ethnic minorities, are geographically clustered [4]. They relocate to where the jobs are—be it a carpet mill in Dalton, Georgia, or a poultry plant in Newberry, South Carolina. The results are an uneven geographic distribution clustered around certain types of agro-industrial production or other employment sectors that appear to rely mostly on Latino workers.

In South Carolina, the 41,000 Hispanics (others estimate the number to be as high as 150,000) [14] represent a relatively small proportion of the state's 3.7 million population. However, they hold approximately 20 percent of the state's meat industry jobs [3]. In Newberry, where a full one-third of the Louis Rich turkey processing plant workers are Latinos [3, 14], the numbers are not inconsequential and alarm many (as it does the residents of Lexington County where the Hispanic population grew by two-thirds in six years).

In North Carolina and Georgia, increased labor demands in construction and industry have attracted Hispanic workers and have resulted in a 75 percent increase in the states' Hispanic population [13]. In North Carolina, population projections indicate the state's Hispanic population could reach 216,000 by 2020. However, a Latino advocacy group indicates that by 1998 there already were between 250,000 to 300,000 Hispanics residing in the state [14].

Like Georgia, South Carolina, and Kentucky, the poultry processing industry in North Carolina can be credited for the Latino population explosion in specific communities. An example is Siler City where the town's population is already 40 percent Hispanic [14]. Different industries, such as tobacco and horse farms, produce similar settlement patterns throughout the South and Southeast.

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While some Hispanics still participate in seasonal employment, most in-migrants seek permanent rather than seasonal employment. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that the important difference in the current pattern is not necessarily the presence of Hispanics in the South, but the rapid concentrated entry and *permanency* of these new Latino communities.

Second Challenge

Hence, the South's second challenge is to accept the permanency and understand the potential impact the population shifts have on host communities. As stated previously, Latinos are no longer sojourners and invisible as seasonal workers. Today, Latinos are community fixtures. Moreover, migration history informs us that established communities become population pipelines for others to follow. As Latinos aggregate in specific locales, sending communities are often recreated in the receiving communities. Latinization occurs and "Latino Rows" or "Mexicantowns" emerge. Once established, the critical mass of Latinos has significant community and market consequences. Latinos impact the socioeconomic well-being of the community first and foremost by expanding the consumer base. According to the *ABJ Business Journal* [1], Latino buying power has increased by 65 percent since 1990. In Texas and Florida, Hispanic purchasing power in 1997 amounted to $56 billion and $33 billion, respectively [1]. On the downside, higher concentrations of Latinos impose immediate net costs, i.e., funding education to meet any additional or special needs of the new population. Other expected changes include an increase in poverty rates, lower median incomes, and an overall lower level of education in the community. Of less consequence, but very obvious, is the presence of ethnic items on the store shelves, the appearance of bilingual media (radio and television), and religious services. Case studies documenting the impact of Latino settlement in the rural Midwest clearly indicate communities were ill prepared to meet the increased demands in housing, diverse cultural interests, public services, and schooling [2, 8, 10,12].

"The communication barrier impedes full participation in health care, social services, law enforcement, religion, and school."

Language

Language and language use continue to be among the most important cultural differences Latinos and the host community must bridge. Though Texas and Florida have a history of working with linguistically different populations, most Southern states have no recent experiences of working with populations whose first language is not English. As more Latinos with limited English proficiency relocate away from historic settlement areas, limited availability of bilingual professionals makes it more difficult to bridge the language gap. In institutional settings, the communication barrier impedes full participation in health care, social services, law enforcement, religion, and school. In health care, health care institutions struggle to meet the needs of patients who cannot describe symptoms or understand instructions from professional staff who lack the necessary language skills to communicate with their patients. The experience of the Lincoln Community Health Center in Durham, North Carolina, illustrates what is happening. Latino patients, the Center reports, tripled between 1993-1996. This increase (7.1 per-

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cent of all patients) forced the Center to add bilingual staff and to provide all basic information in Spanish [17].

Similar language barriers impede effective law enforcement in the Latino community. As Hispanics increasingly become the target of criminal activity [14], law enforcement personnel must not only uphold the law but also safeguard the rights of individuals who may have difficulty understanding both the language and the law. Some communities report establishing special task force units to look into crimes against Hispanics [14]. Other strategies used by law enforcement agencies include expanding translating capabilities, hiring bilingual staff, and expanding the list of acceptable forms of identification beyond the usual state driver's licenses [13].

Media reports from throughout the region indicate community churches also struggle to balance the linguistic and cultural needs of the new flock [3, 6,17] without disrupting the flow of services to the native residents. How to incorporate "*la virgen morena*," i.e., the Virgin of Guadalupe, without displacing the Virgin Mary, is a case in point. Local parishes are struggling to provide additional services in Spanish, as well as outreach services, to linguistically isolated households. Will social institutions faced with limited resources and limited or nonexistent bilingual staff meet the challenge?

"The rural South's healthy economy will continue to attract Latinos looking for economic opportunity and a chance at the American dream"

Conclusion

The rural South's healthy economy will continue to attract Latinos looking for economic opportunity and a chance at the American dream. While some still view Latinos as a threat to our cultural homogeneity, employers faced with an aging white population consider Latinos a good work force available at low wages. As such, employers will continue to aggressively recruit them. Ultimately, Latinos can play a central role in shaping a prosperous future for the South. However, many of the factors associated with successful development are related to social capital [5]. While most Latinos arriving in the Southeast have already acquired migration specific social capital [11, 9], Latinos must acquire additional social and human capital in order to fully contribute to the economic prosperity of the rural South. This will require that as Latinos weave into the fabric of the South, especially the rural South, meaningful interaction takes place between Latinos and non-Latino residents in host communities. This should provide state and local policy makers a more accurate picture of the Hispanic population and enable them to make informed decisions when allocating resources in a way that will better address Latino needs in future community development efforts. Finally, whether the South decides to funnel its resources to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure the successful and full participation of Latinos will likely determine how effective it will be in preserving its economic strength and stability in the years to come.

Endnotes

[a] "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably to refer to individuals from Spanish-speaking people.

[b] Differences of opinion about preferred usage exist. Individual choice for self-identification within the Latino/Hispanic community varies according to generation, age, education, nationality, political orientation, and place.

[c] For the purpose of this paper, the South includes Alabama, Arkansas,

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Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

[d] The oldest permanent European settlement in North America, St. Augustine, founded in 1565 predates Plymoth Rock by more than half a century, and comes fifty years after Ponce de Leons' expedition to Florida in 1513.

[e] To date, few scholarly analyses have researched the Latino presence in the Southeast. The most common source of information comes from media generated reports [9]. Current population census enumeration differs from those that state health departments report and from data provided by advocacy groups. The census data is the most conservative, and advocacy group data the most generous.

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Published by
Southern Rural Development Center
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